

MG Hunzeker Blogger Roundtable with Mark Finkelstein, Newbusters.org; Victoria Coates, Restate.com; Ward Carroll, Military.com; and Charlie Quidnunc, Whizbang.com

JACK HOLT (Moderator): Maj. Gen. Hunzeker do you have an opening statement for this or are we just going to get started?

MG HUNZEKER: I'll be very brief, with only 30 minutes I'd rather take your questions and find out what's on peoples' mind. I command CPATT, the Civilian Police Assistance Training Team, and basically, I work with the Minister of Interior daily or every other day, and my goal as the Training General is truly to help (inaudible) he is the only one with Transition in his title, and our goal is to stand the Government of Iraq up, specifically the Ministry of Interior up, to transition to the civilian Government of Iraq control. Since 1 January all the academies are now under their control both for training, life support, and (inaudible) to take care of that and that'll be 13 academies. I work very closely in, what I call the 3-legged stool, that being the National Police with is about 24,000 strong, the Department of Border Enforcement which is about 28,000 strong and they control all the borders and ports of entry, and we also work with all the 18 different provinces and all 18 chiefs of police which we call (inaudible). That's about 135,000 man force. So we train and equip them and now we're trying to go to the next level with different training programs and different initiatives and I think you can see that in my opening statement. (Editor's note: the opening statement refers to his press briefing with Maj. Gen. Caldwell earlier in the day).

So, and in keeping it short, what are your questions?

JH: Ok let's start, and I'm going to pick one at random, Victoria, your question.

VICTORIA COATES: Great, good morning General Hunzeker I'm Victoria Coates and I'm with Redstate.com thank you very much for talking to us. I'm interested in why it's been very challenging to create a viable Iraqi police force. It seems to be very easy for Americans to be pejorative and condemn the training of the Iraqis and condemn the Iraqis actually for not being more eager to man a police force as we understand it. But I was curious to know if you could talk a little bit about the history of a civilian police force in Iraq, was there any equivalent under Sadaam or are you dealing with a cultural as well as a logistical challenge here?

GEN H: Well Victoria, I really appreciate that question. Back in 2003 (inaudible) during Sadaam Hussein's reign, there was a police force but they were secondary to the army. So when you think of the traditional who was enforcing the rule of law, where you have courts and then you have prisons; it was the function of the police that was really being done by the army. So the police were really in the (inaudible) but they weren't that powerful and in fact in many cases they were reactionary and they were passive, they stayed in their police stations. If there was a crime committed they were called in and in some cases they responded and in some cases they didn't. And in fact in some cases a riot had to be used to get them out of their stations to actually get something done.

(Inaudible) one of the jobs that was most sought after was to be a traffic policeman where you could pull somebody over, make up an offense, and basically charge them any fine you wanted. So, we've come from that to actually building a police force which is getting more and more professionalized everyday. And we've brought in outside instructors in the crawl phase, we owned all the platforms and over the last three plus years the Iraqis have taken over the platforms and their training how to be an Iraqi policeman to their own "shertas", which is Iraqi for "policeman."

So we've come a long way on the teaching side. I will tell you that if you look at the 18 different provinces, some of the provinces truly get it. As you know it's been said here that about ninety plus percent of the violence is really in six provinces and we've looked throughout all of Iraq and in the 12 provinces where you don't have high occurrences of violence the police are effective, they're out patrolling. We're able to go to the next level in many cases with the police stations that are there from the far north to the far south and we're getting to the establishment of the rule of law. And the prisons, of course, are catching up and the police are the action arm there. But I've got to tell you, out in al-Anbar where we had some successes of late, and you into Baghdad, you look at Diyala, Sol hadin, and I just spent the last two days in Basra; you are challenged there. And it's a constant struggle for the police for not only the rule of law, but also to fight the counter-governmental forces that exist there. So that's the challenge and I think their doing a sterling job there, in fact what I see on a daily basis is great leaders, great shertas putting their lives on the line and it's truly becoming a more professional force on a daily basis.

VC: Thank you, very much.

JH: Ok, Mark.

MARK FINKELSTEIN: Gen. Hunzeker it's Mark Finkelstein from Newsbusters, you were gracious in sitting down with me when I was in Baghdad in November and it's great to have a chance to speak with you again, thank you.

GEN H: I remember it well, Mark.

MF: You refer to the notable success that you have had out in Anbar and when some of us spoke with Admiral Fox just a week ago he mentioned that whereas over a year ago there were no recruits in Anbar there were over a thousand in December and 600 alone in the very tough city of Ramadi; could I ask you to expand on that? How have you been able to achieve that sort of success? And I do have a second question that hopefully we will be able to get to as well.

GEN H: Mark, I'll make time for it for sure. But the real success there has been achieved there for, I think, leadership at the MEF (Marine Expeditionary Force) level because of their involvement in doing this and also at the provincial level and you've got several sheiks basically step up to the plate, one being Sheik Sittar. And what he is able to do is he is basically, you know they are mad as heck and they're not going to take it anymore, and they have gone out and they are recruiting in huge numbers. I mean I have met with

the Chief of Police about two months ago, he came in to see me in Baghdad here, and said: "What can I do, I have four thousand young men who want to sign up to be shertas." And I had the head of the policing function for the MoI there and he said: "I will have police orders for those guys to be hired tomorrow." So we hired them before we could even get them to the academies because it was such a change in sea state out there and we wanted to reinforce success. There were over four thousand men who volunteered to be shertas, we got the hiring orders out in 72 hours, and they started being paid and then we went through the process of finding the academies to get them trained up and get them equipped to be policemen out in the field. A huge turnabout, again, leadership at the MEF level, and soon-to-be-major general Bob Neller, who's the deputy commander out there; I've gone out there twice over the last two months and sat down with the provincial government there, sat down with the police chief, sat down with all the leadership there; and we have looked at ... if you can sign them up we'll find out ways to train them and we'll find ways to equip them. And I've got to tell you, it really has been a change in sea state that we have embraced. We've diverted resources from other areas to get them out there I think we're seeing the affects of it on the ground because in the MEF's area of operations they're able to give some of that battlespace to these new units that are being put together, to the shertas that are reinforcing the police stations throughout al-Anbar province. Does that answer your question?

MF: Thank you, very much. Yes it does, I have a follow-up, I'll differ to my colleagues and come back in the second cycle.

JH: Ok, I thought I heard a beep a few minutes ago; somebody just joined us that hasn't reported in yet.

CHARLIE QUIDNUNC: Yes, this is Charlie Quidnunc with Whizbang.

JH: Yes, Charlie, glad to have you with us. Do you have a question for Gen. Hunzeker?

CQ: Yes, I was wondering what the Iraqi forces can do about the massive truck bombs. Do you really have a way to investigate how and who manufactured the equipment, who delivered it, where they get their supplies and that kind of thing? Can we track these guys down and deal with these massive ones like the one this weekend that killed about 120 (people) in Baghdad?

GEN H: I looked at the report on that exact bombing in detail and where it was placed and how it was really in the center-of-mass in the marketplace and the Minister of Interior and I sat down and talked about that and he has ... just recently we figured out what devices we would help him purchase with their money, to help detect many of these explosives that are coming in and how we would take areas where a lot of people collect like markets and mosques (inaudible) and help partition them off and use some of these devices and consequently that hasn't been done and that would not become the norm but it needs to be in areas where we continue to see attacks take place and where we expect that they're going to come in. And, you know, the challenge we have here is you can't be strong everywhere and with all the other on-going activities and the patrolling and the

neighborhood watches that are going on; one or two of these huge bombs go in and it really was a huge bomb this past weekend, get through, and they will have catastrophic success. "They" meaning the insurgent forces. So we really need to look where people collect together in large numbers and take appropriate measures. And I think the Government of Iraq and specifically the Ministry of Interior is looking at doing that where people collect in the future.

CQ: What about tracking who created it, are there forensics people there who can track back to where the type of explosives came from, where it was manufactured, or is it so common it could come from anywhere?

GEN H: I will tell you, there are many operational answers to your question that I really can't get into on this line, but we do have a forensics lab that we've developed for tracking in downtown Baghdad, they are getting better and better at it, and we are assisting them wherever we can. We have really found the source of some of these manufacturers and we've dealt with that. But practically there is very little to go on based on the nature of the blast that took place. But there are operations going into those people who make bombs and how they get the explosives in and put the whole thing together.

CQ: Thanks.

JH: Ok, Ward.

WARD CARROLL: Hi General Hunzeker, this is Ward Carroll of Military.com, thanks for joining us, sir. I don't have your bio, is your area of responsibility just al-Anbar province or the entire country?

GEN H: I am the commanding general for the training and equipping for the Iraqi Police which is, again, about 305,000 folks or shertas as we call them, and there is DBE which is the Department of Border Enforcement, either the IPS which we call the eighteen different provinces which is about 135,000 folks, or the National Police which is about 24,400 strong in their full strength about nine brigades all of which are part of the Baghdad Security plan.

WC: My question sir, is what is the regional transition strategy? Is it Baghdad first sort of get it then spread it? And secondly do you feel like you're event driven or time driven as you go forward?

GEN H: Ward I'm going to answer your question a couple of different ways. One is you've asked sort of an operational question about whether is it event or time driven; and I talked events on the ground, you know, we don't want to make this time driven because that doesn't work. It's got to have certain events that are critical to the plan and I'm pretty sure it's going to be event driven as it goes along. But it's really outside my lane so that's my personal opinion on how things will be executed. But I've got to tell you when you're talking about the civil security forces, which the police are, from the start the Iraqis have been in charge. They took the borders, the ports of entry and those 28,000

border policemen, border guards is what we call them, are under the control of a two-star headquarters, Maj. Gen. Mosun. He's quite capable with his five different district commanders running command and control, he can cover down on 400 plus border forts, he's running 14 different ports of entry, I mean he has a capable workforce he's executing. We have some transition teams out there but he's totally in control; but you talk about the 18 different provinces and the 18 different police chiefs and I think I've met all of them now and dealt with issues with each one of the different provinces, they clearly are in charge. Now, base on how long they've been in the job, their experience, and the skill sets they bring it gives a different level of effectiveness and if they can't do the job, you know, they've been replaced and they've been replaced throughout time. But they clearly are in charge. And they sit, as the police chief in those provinces based upon the provincial councils that exists. So they have the ability to hire and fire them and it becomes their province and their police; which is so powerful when you talk about a unity government and the 18 provincial governments underneath it.

The other one is the National Police. That's the one I think you refer to as operationally how they will be phased into the plan. As you know, they're under the command of General Hussein who, basically, has formed and equipped the nine brigades (inaudible) and those nine brigades, eight are part of the plan and one is only for the (inaudible) which is basically a collective training event which we would do in our forces at NTC or CMTC or JRTC where we have a training event to do some collective training. But by and large they're committed to the Baghdad security plan. So they will be, based on the plan and how it's put together, with General Gusby the overall commander, they'll be under his control and the minute they've executed that will be under total Iraqi control as the Coalition phases out its operation. (inaudible) have already started with different events taking place and it's based off the successes that are achieved. I think that's how the (inaudible).

JH: Has anybody not had the chance to ask a question? ... Alright, then let's open it up for general discussion. Mark, you had a second question.

MF: Yes, I did. General you said the magic word when you were talking before you talked about getting the recruits out in Anbar paid and as you know there was just a congressional hearing yesterday and a suggestion was being made to the provincial authority paying military people and others in cash and my understanding from being there was that there is still a lack of an electronic banking system and that it remains necessary to pay people in cash could you give us an update as far as that is concerned?

GEN H: Well Mark, unfortunately nothing has changed since you left. It still is the same system that we had when you left. There really is not an electronic banking system or much of a banking system out there. In fact one of the challenges is when we pay these persons we pay them in person and it's a fairly long process. It takes a couple of days and they all have to come in, like when I first joined the Army you report for your pay and they pay you off by counting it out in front of you. And then you basically make sure that that's the sherta that signed up and went through the training and has been on your

rolls forever. In any case unfortunately we have not got to the 21st Century electronically in al-Anbar yet.

MF: So, I mean by extension therefore in Baghdad three years ago we were paying people in cash and it probably is no surprise to Congress really that there was no banking in the whole country at that time nor is there now for many people.

GEN H: Mark you're exactly right.

MF: Thank you.

JH: Anybody else?

VC: Yes, may I ask one more question?

GEN H: Is that Victoria?

VC: Yes, General Hunzeker, you mentioned the Iraqi Minister of Interior a couple of times and how closely you are working with him. I was wondering if you could give us some perspective on him as an individual and what his priorities are in particular for the Iraqi forces.

GEN H: Yes, that's a really great question about what his priorities are for the Iraqi people and what he wants to do. I just talked to him about that today and trying to figure out that content. If you have message that you want to send out to, basically the people, that I'm going to be talking to, either in front of the cameras or today on a phone call, what would you say? And he said, and I quote, "the Ministry of the Interior, has within it very brave people who are loyal to the people of Iraq. Everyday they make sacrifices, for their country, where they are on duty serving, protecting the citizens despite all the challenges facing them. And I've got to tell you, I mean, this Minister, I have total faith in his ability to do the job. He fully understands the challenges ahead. He's an ex military man, he was in the air force. He got out and became an independent businessman. And I said, "Well what happens on the day that we were attacking into Baghdad, what were you doing that day?" He said well I was at a food shelter handing out food because I knew there were people who would be needing food in this case. That's what I thought I should be. And he met up with, I think, a Marine MEF brigade (inaudible). And he met the commander on the ground, and they became fast friends. He knew what it was going to be like in Baghdad and yet he wanted to be part of the solution early on. Never in his wildest dreams did he believe he would become the Minister of the Interior. And if you remember, he was the last minister picked in this government. It was the most sought after Ministry as it is clearly the ministry with the most power. And he was basically picked because he has no ties to any party. And so, because of that he's always been on a fragile ... and nobody's troops were supporting him ... but because he's done such an excellent job, he continues to stay the Minister of the Interior and has the backing of the Prime Minister; and quite frankly, has worked very well with all the other ministries. So hard work got him there; he works incredibly hard. He's dedicated,

he's honest, and he doesn't take any nonsense when it comes to misbehavior; he reacts immediately to it. Every time I've taken evidence to him of his conduct, or corruption or anything along those lines, he's active within 72 hours. When he punishes people, and he does it frequently, he puts it out to everybody in his lot, all 300 thousand employees. That this behavior took place, and these are the actions he took to correct it. So again, he clearly gets it, and he is part of the solution, and he is the future of Iraq when it comes to what we're doing for the Iraqi security forces.

VC: Thank you.

WC: General this is Ward Carol. If I could ask you a two part question; what is your greatest source of optimism, and what is your greatest frustration? Is it the cultural differences? Is it the will of the American people? Is it the wrangling on the Hill?

GEN H: Ok, what is . . . my greatest sense of optimism is every time I go out to see Iraqi police, you know, in operation or in training or anywhere, I physically break ranks and go down and talk to them and say, "How are you doing? How long have you been doing this? Where's your family?" And just, you know . . . sort of what you would do with a soldier when you're walking around. And they are absolutely so positive, so incredibly upbeat, recognizing that they are the future of Iraq. If you go to a graduation and you see a father with five sons, you go oh my Gosh. This is incredible. This is truly a turn where people want to be a part of the solution, want to be a part of the new Iraq. And that to me is absolutely incredible. And you know, I go up and I say . . . I've had too many reporters come in and say: "are you a Shia or are you a Sunni?" I've never had any other answer other than I'm an Iraqi. And so, it's that optimism that I get that just clearly keeps me going in this job on a daily basis because they get it, so we better get it.

Now, my biggest frustration, that's a great question. I think my frustration is affecting change. And I think I'm genetically ingrained and I want something done immediately, and culturally it doesn't get done immediately here. And I have . . . you know, it's almost like turning the air craft carrier into the wind a little bit, in some cases. But change is taking place. And I want it to go faster than it is in some cases. So I have to step back and say Ok, if it's going to be a government of Iraq solution, if it's going to be an Iraqi solution, it's got to be their way, and it's got to be their solution. And that's a cultural lesson that I learn everyday and that's my biggest frustration.

WC: Thank you sir.

JH: Alright, anyone else?

MF: I do have a . . . if there's nobody else, I do have one more question. General, at Newsbusters our focus is on what we consider to be media bias. Again when I was there, you mentioned the fact that recruitment and training goals have met or exceeded, or the actual results have met or exceeded goals could you please give us an update on that? And could I ask you to comment on what you see as the discrepancies between the reality

that you're experiencing and the certain coverage you're seeing in the mainstream American media?

GEN H: Well, you know, one of the great successes we've had is. . . I discusses this earlier was in al-Anbar. We don't have that same successes out in Diyala to the numbers that we really want to get to. But most of the other provinces, the recruitment is going very well. As you know, similar to regimental systems in some countries, we do recruit, hopefully for the police, and that's a strength and it's also a weakness; in most cases, when you're set up with a vibrant connection to the community, a vibrant connection to the rule of law, and the people understand and have faith in their police, it's very easy to recruit. We're basically turning people away. It's the troubled areas, you know, the six provinces that you hear about all the time where there's a lot of violence and the like, that's truly your challenge as you go through this. Recruiting there is not at the numbers that we would like, we're still fairly successful. And again, I don't want to be Pollyannaish here, but I think we have turned a corner in al-Anbar in many ways.

What was the second part? This is Mark again right?

MF: Yes it is. If you could comment on the discrepancies that you see between reality on ground as you experience it and the coverage you see in the American mainstream media.

GEN H: That's a tough question. I think, I constantly get asked, "do you have militia infiltration" and things along those lines. I took some press members down to a training site the other day and the brigade commander was there, and one of the reporters asked the staff, "are you militia?" And he said no, no. No I'm not. And he [reporter] says, "do you have any militia within your organization?" And he said, "no, no. I have no militia within my organization." And he said, "well what would you do if you found militia in your organization?" And he said, this was General (inaudible) of the 8th Brigade, and he said, "you know, at this training we're doing today, there was an order given that no cell phones were to be used. And two shertas were using cell phones today and they're no longer national policemen. So what do you think I would do if I found a militia in my ranks?" So clearly, I've heard all the estimates on militia infiltration, and that's the one that gets me. But the real issue becomes, is there militia intimidation? And that's not a black or white area that's a gray area. And in many case . . . we were walking all the different police stations in Baghdad to do an assessment with the Minister of the Interior, and there was a sherta that was interviewed the other day, and they said "are you militia?" And he said, "oh no. No, I'm not militia." He said "well will you fight the militia." And the young sherta said, "you know, I live in Sadr City. And when I leave for work to be a policemen there are militia in my neighborhood to guard my family. And they are good militia. But when I come to work, there are militia that go out and kill people in the night, and set IEDs. And those are bad militia. And that's the militia that I'm fighting." So even from this young sherta who just signed up to be a policeman in Baghdad, it's hard for him to differentiate about who are the good militia and the bad militia. And it's truly a challenge. From a national standpoint, we've seen that throughout history that militias have stood up over time basically to fill a void. And that void, that exists now, can only be . . . basically once the security forces are out and in

numbers and they have the faith and confidence of the electorate and the people of Iraq, then those militias will go away. So that's the thing, that when I see in the press the huge numbers of militia infiltration, that why I think I'd get (inaudible) ability to report.

MF: Thank you very much General.

JH: Alright, we're about out of time. General, do you have any closing comments?

GEN H: Do I have any closing comments? That's a great question. I feel like I've been on 20/20 for the last hour and a half. It really gets me to think about the things we do on a daily basis. This has really been a great opportunity to do that. I guess what I'll tell you is, as I look to what's taking place in the future for the Iraqi security forces, they by and large have been in the lead from the start. The shertas that I see on the ground in a daily act of heroism are committed to the people of Iraq. And there are heroes everyday that are willing to die for their country. We've had 12,000 Iraqi police within the year that have either been killed or injured within the line of duty since this started. It's just eye watering when you think of all the cases that took place (inaudible) and along those lines. So that's, you know, I guess my parting message is they get it, they're working hard to get there, and they're dealing with (inaudible)."

JH: Alright. General thank you very much. Thank you all for participating and we hope we can do this a little more often. We appreciate the time sir.